

# VIOLIN AND VIOLA BASICS

BY DAVID MILSOM

**Parents / carers / helpers:** please keep an eye on your child, make sure that they practise as directed and help them with these points if needed. Refer to my set of photographs 'Violin-Viola Basics' to help show how it's done.

## LEFT HAND THINGS TO REMEMBER

Underline the things you struggle with...

- Straight Wrist
- 1<sup>st</sup> finger backwards 'L' and thumb opposite 1<sup>st</sup> finger
- Keep 1<sup>st</sup> finger and thumb still when you move your fingers
- Curvy fingers
- Elbow swings – round to your right for the lowest string
- Fingers close together or finger space

## RIGHT HAND THINGS TO REMEMBER

Underline the things you struggle with...

- How to hold your bow: little finger on top, curvy thumb on silver bit at first
- Big straight bows in between bridge and fingerboard 4 on each string exercise
- Once string at once – look and see!
- Down-bow (left to right) comes first!
- Re-take down-bow: CIRCLES IN THE AIR
- More bow = more sound; too near bridge = scratchy, too near fingerboard = weedy!
- String crossing – do this slowly with long bows:

G   D   G   D   D   A   D   A   A   E   A   E

## **HOLDING AND STANDING**

Underline the things you struggle with...

- Violin on little shelf – left shoulder
  - Violin level
  - Both feet a little distance apart – stand firm and still, but not stiff!
  - Bow-hold check: little finger on top, curvy fingers and thumb!
  - Rest position – violin under right arm (strings face out) and bow dangle to ground
  - Practise bowing!
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## **HOW TO PRACTISE**

- Read my lesson notes to remember what to do
- Look at one thing at once – be calm and careful
- Read it, sing or say it....*and only then play it!*

When you have pieces to read, try this way of working:

1. Clap the rhythm (the long and short notes, saying 'Ta, ta-te' or 'One-and, two-and' as I will have shown you).
2. Say/sing the notes - LETTER NAMES
3. Say/sing the finger numbers
4. Bow in the air (do down-bow and up-bow movements in time with the notes)
5. Bow in the air AND say/sing notes and fingers

You might also need to take it BIT BY BIT if it's a long piece – bar by bar, or line by line.

**NEVER MOVE ON TO THE NEXT THING UNTIL YOU HAVE DONE IT THREE TIMES RIGHT!**

## **TOP TEN RULES FOR LESSONS AND PRACTISING**

(in no particular order!)

1. ALWAYS BE CAREFUL AND GENTLE WITH YOUR VIOLIN – IT IS FRAGILE AND EXPENSIVE!
2. LISTEN HARD TO ME IN LESSONS AND ALWAYS TRY YOUR BEST
3. ASK ME IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND
4. PRACTISE FOR NO LESS THAN 10 MINUTES AND NO MORE THAN 20 MINUTES, AT LEAST 4 TIMES A WEEK
5. READ YOUR LESSON AND PRACTISE SHEET TO KNOW WHAT TO DO
6. ASK QUESTIONS IN THE LESSONS IF YOU AREN'T SURE WHAT TO DO
7. ALWAYS TAKE YOUR VIOLIN HOME AFTER SCHOOL TO PRACTISE AND REMEMBER TO BRING IT TO SCHOOL FOR THE LESSON
8. ALWAYS CHECK THE MUSIC NOTICEBOARD FOR YOUR LESSON AND REMEMBER WHEN TO COME AND SEE ME.
9. ALWAYS PRACTISE AT A MUSIC STAND AT THE RIGHT HEIGHT – SO YOU CAN SEE THE MUSIC ON EYE LEVEL WHEN YOU STAND
10. MAKE SURE THE VIOLIN IS IN TUNE – WITH A PIANO OR PITCH PIPES. ASK A PARENT TO HELP YOU AND IF YOU GET STUCK LET ME KNOW SO I CAN HELP

## **LIST OF ACCOMPANYING PHOTOGRAPHS**

1. How to stand and stand in front of a music stand.
2. Violin hold.
3. Left hand 'shape' ready to hold violin
4. View of left hand
5. View of left hand
6. Wrong left hand – sticking out wrist is bad!
7. Wrong left hand ('frying pan hand' – Nelson books) – wrist should be clear of violin
8. Holding a pen with finger tips – bow hold preparation
9. 'Grown up' bow hold!
10. Another bow hold view
11. Another view of playing – note bow mid-way between bridge and fingerboard, level violin etc

## **NOTE TO PARENTS / PRACTISE HELPERS**

Here are some pretty serious but vitally important teaching points for your child. If it is at all possible for you to help/encourage in practising, please do! Please look at all of these sheets and the accompanying photographs in order to learn what your child should look like when playing – the photographs are of a slightly younger ‘me’ trying not to laugh in embarrassment!

I cannot stress too strongly how important it is for parents and/or carers to help their children practise. Please hold them accountable to between 10 and 20 minutes at least four times a week in the earlier stages; supervise as necessary (if you want to take a full part it might be best if you could arrange to meet me in a school lesson to see what we are doing) and encourage them in every way. The violin is a difficult instrument to master and the key to success with young children is short-term, achievable goals and lots of praise for effort.

If you want to discuss with me in more detail how you might be able to support your child’s learning do not hesitate to contact me – initially by email if this is possible.

My favourite motto is Felix Mendelssohn’s favourite Seneca quotation – ‘verum gaudium res severa est’ (‘real joy is a serious business’). Nowhere is this more true than in learning violin – serious yes, but, when mastered, a wonderful joy indeed!